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Welfare Reforms Scream Discrimination

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is shocked to hear that proposed legislation, which is clearly in breach of the Bill of Rights Act, discriminating on the basis of gender, marital status and family, is still eligible for passage through Parliament and into law.

“The fact that the Government was already aware that the Social Assistance (Future Focus) Bill was in breach of human rights and still has it scheduled for reading, leaves many women stunned,” says Elizabeth Bang, NCWNZ National President.

Attorney-General Chris Finlayson has found that the proposed welfare reforms are discriminatory. An outcome that was predicted in an earlier cabinet paper stating “Specific changes we are making to the welfare system may not be consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993. There will be a reaction to the removal of DPB for women alone while retaining Widow’s Benefit.”¹

If the Government is to act within the requirements of international human rights law, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), then Article 2 f. applies:

To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;

“This would mean that as soon as the Government passes the law, it then needs to modify or abolish the law to ensure compliance,” says Elizabeth Bang.

“If we delve a bit deeper, then this legislation could be viewed as discriminating on the basis of race also. Not only are women going to be disproportionately discriminated against, but it will be Maori women who stand to be most adversely impacted,” says Elizabeth Bang.

“We understand that some parties support the democratic and participatory process, but when the very population one stands to represent is also the population with most to lose, support for bad legislation needs to be rethought.”

Further Information:

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“Women Influencing Policy”

¹ <http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/newsroom/media-releases/news/2010/paper-a-overview.pdf>