

17 May 2018

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
Prime Minister
New Zealand Labour Party
Freepost PO Box 18 888
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160 New Zealand

Sent via email: jacinda.ardern@parliament.govt.nz

Dear Prime Minister,

We, the undersigned, are a group of community organisations working to support young people in Australia.

We write regarding the uniquely harsh conditions facing young New Zealanders experiencing homelessness in Australia.

We acknowledge and congratulate you on your Government's progressive and compassionate stance on Trans-Tasman issues so far. Our concern relates to a matter which has garnered little attention in either New Zealand or Australia but continues to be a tragedy for a number of New Zealand citizens.

WEstjustice has worked with a number of young New Zealanders aged 15 to 18 years who arrived in Australia after 26 February 2001 and are therefore not entitled to income support from the Australian Government.

These young people are unable to live at home due to family violence and breakdown and as a result became homeless. Many have spent their entire lives in Australia or come to Australia as very young children and have no connections to New Zealand or the Pacific Islands.

The inability to access Australian income support means these young people do not have a 'safety net', and are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The consequences, especially for young women and girls, are shocking.

This issue was detailed extensively in WEstjustice's 'Couch Surfing Limbo' research report, which was launched by Victoria's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Liana Buchanan in November 2017. We enclose a copy of this report for your reference.

We acknowledge that your government supports Australian young people living in New Zealand who are homeless, via the provision of the Youth Payment. Unfortunately, this generosity is not reciprocated.

The cohorts in both countries are relatively small, but are arguably the most vulnerable members of our society. As at the end of September 2017, 6,506 young Australians aged between 15 and 17 years were receiving the benefit given to homeless young people in Australia. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2.5% of Australia's estimated resident population was born in New Zealand. If New Zealand teenagers living in Australia received a similar payment at the same

rate as their Australian counterparts, about 160 young people would be expected to receive the benefit.

Westjustice has recently been in correspondence with Rt Hon Winston Peters, Hon Kelvin Davis and the Children's Commissioner, Judge Andrew Becroft. The official response of your government to date has been that the issue is an important one and that the New Zealand Government has raised with Australia, but that it is ultimately a matter for Australia to deal with under its social security system.

We respectfully disagree, and urge you to reconsider this stance. We believe as the vulnerable minors involved are citizens of New Zealand but inhabitants of Australia, both countries have a moral and legal obligation to help fix this anomaly.

We urge you to formally raise the issue with the Australian Government and pursue a joint solution.

Sincerely Yours,

Anti-Poverty Network - SA

Djerriwarrh Community Education Services

Australian Council of Social Service

Federation of Community Legal Centres

Barwon Community Legal Service

Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre

Bridging Worx

Iwi N Aus
Inner Melbourne Community Legal

Uniting Church in Australia (UCA)

Justice Connect

Uniting Church (Tasmania)

Lighthouse Foundation

Uniting Church (Victoria)

McAuley Community Services for Women

Whitelion Youth Agency Ltd

Melbourne City Mission

Victoria Maori Wardens

Melbourne Tautoko Whanau

Victorian Samoan Advisory Group

Morunga Migration

WEstjustice

Odyssey House

West Heidelberg Community Legal Service

Smart Justice

Wombat Housing & Support Service

Smart Justice for Young People

WynBay LLEN

Springvale Monash Legal Service

Wyndham Community & Education Centre

St Kilda Legal Service